

Chapter 1

Introduction: Why Cosmoipolitan Justice? Species-Ethics and the Competing Ecumene of the Axial Age

Abstract While I want to retain a commitment to justice as inherently universal, the Axial Age proposes a plurality of historical forms for achieving such universality as a species-ethic. Karl Jaspers elaborated the concept of the Axial Age as an attempt to reset the initiation of modernity at the seminal 800–200 BCE dates. He also sought to integrate these distinct cultural heritages more deeply into the post-WWII, decentered, multi-polar, and non-Eurocentric onset of what he terms global philosophy. While the Axial Age remains a contested concept, Jaspers' confidence in the prospect of boundless communication provides us with a linguistic medium for reorienting the roots of political theory. My focus on the universal role of the second person in each tradition offers an abiding constant even in light of my endorsement of multiple modernities as a necessary consequence of the Axial Age—stemming simultaneously from cultural elites in India, China, the Hebrew prophetic heritage, and Greek philosophy. As a philosophical complement to Jaspers and the growing social scientific literature on multiple modernities, I amend his views by highlighting three contemporary appropriations of his Axial thesis. These include Taylor's probing genealogical analysis of secularity, Habermas's proclamation of the onset of a postsecular age, and my own transcivilizational recasting of Rawls' overlapping consensus. My defense of cosmoipolitan justice seeks agreement upon shared sets of species-ethical norms that nonetheless take distinct legal forms and divergent background justifications.

Keywords Axial age • Cosmoipolitan • Ecumene • Jurgen Habermas • Karl Jaspers • Multiple modernities • Original position • John Rawls • Second person • Stadiad consciousness • Charles Taylor • Transcensus • Eric Voegelin

1.1 Introduction: Justice as Universal Species-Ethic

When approaching concerns of global justice, philosophical methods couched in the communicative medium of rational justification should realize universal capacities for species-wide participation. Insofar as problems like immigration, the environment, international crime, regional warfare, human rights abuses, and vast material

inequalities require international solutions, the requirements of justice are truly concerns affecting all humanity. The intuitive appeal of cosmopolitanism builds upon the presumption of global institutions as the crucial player in serving to protect the particular individual as global citizen. Cosmopolitan institutions as multi-polar in functionality and decentralized in loci of power—like the United Nations, International Criminal Court, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and UNESCO—thereby protect individuals from domination from multiple possible sites. These include but are not limited to other individuals, family, city, kingdom, nation-state, peoples, empire, and even emergent regional/continent-wide networks.

However, as much as cosmopolitanism meets maximal thresholds of scope and scale for the growing sets of problems affecting all humanity, in the parlance of Jürgen Habermas (but antithetical to his lexical priority of the moral over the ethical), my focus on justice will privilege the universality of a species-ethic (Hegel/Marx/Kierkegaard) over moral universality (Kant). Even within Habermas' own work, his political cosmopolitanism all too hastily presumes deontological moral universality as the primary concern of his works on global political justice, especially when doing so produces the unintended consequence of legal-juridical domination. In addition to the endemic sources of conflicting levels of political authority, as the famous debates between Habermas and Rawls have demonstrated, there are myriad equally plausible contexts in which more specific ethical concerns tied to race, gender, age, generation, religion, or ethnicity might seem more fitting for the particularity of the ethical over the universality of the moral. We could thus heed the forewarnings of Kant—as affirmed in Rawls' *Law of Peoples*—of not lapsing into a legal-juridical soulless despotism. Particularly, we must grant proper consideration to the historical injustices of European colonialism and disaggregated neo-colonialisms as reasons for due skepticism over the purported impartial universality of cosmopolitan institutions. Demographically, it would be no stretch to assume testimonial accounts from the majority of those affected by purportedly universal claims to justice—if given the requisite communicative capabilities—might instead produce another chapter to the long grand-historical narrative of neo-colonial imperialism. Replete references to material motives of cyclical domination rendered legal-juridical would predominate: first-world over second-world and third-world, Western over East/Non-Western, North over South, wealthy elites exponentially increasing profits at the cost of spreading global poverty among masses—even internal to civilized states.

In light of the latest waves of neo-colonialism stirred on by the globalization of inequitable flows of capital, another contributing source of further material injustice would be the species-ethical dimensions of a global epistemic gap. Insofar as the benefits of globalizing trends are asymmetrically distributed, the innovations unleashed by the technological age create rather than eviscerate new classes of haves and have-nots (see Chap. 6). The deepest structural dynamics made most visible through the new social sciences of capability sets in development literature propose we frame our considerations of potentially tyrannical cosmopolitanism as a reciprocally reinforcement of material *and epistemic* causes. Such a functionalist approach successfully weds the teleological with the deontological, particularly

when employing counter-factual reflection to assess functional asymmetries. Casting the technologically fast within a distinctly privileged capability set would fail tests of universal justice when dividing humanity into two species, placing the cognitively, materially, and politically advantaged over the lagging, primitive, and non-technologically endowed.

In light of two-track teleological and deontological rubrics for comparative analysis of forms of injustice, I want to retain the species-wide scope of ethical (and, thus, romantic) cosmopolitanism (Kleingeld 1999), while being mindful of the critical theorist commitment to stave off all forces of domination. Taking the full human emancipation of both species and individuals as the highest goal, I will opt for a comparative civilizational framework that I have elsewhere called *cosmoipolitan justice* (Bowman 2012).

In line with the critical theorists of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, we must relearn the initial lessons of a critique of modernity by reassessing the pre- and post-WWII philosophical landscape. Reason emerging in that period from a tradition of negative dialectics can resonate from multiple voices in a multi-polar world. While in post-World War II Europe, Jaspers' philosophical-faith was the heavy object of critique of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* for its purportedly subjectivist existentialist overtones (Adorno 1966, p. 113, 122–123, 127–128), Jaspers did share with Adorno (and thereby Horkheimer too) the Nietzschean insight that a critical conception of reason derived by multiple empirical and normative sources need not lapse into relativism or nihilistic defeatism. The renaissance of philosophical interest in Jaspers by the likes of Habermas, Taylor, and Bellah after decades of philosophical obscurity places his work in a dubious position. While, until only very recently, Jaspers had all but been ignored by philosophers, social scientists like S.N. Eisenstadt had continued surreptitiously to do the difficult empirical, historical, archeological, and anthropological work to both affirm and redact many of the empirical components of his original Axial thesis.

This long philosophical caesura with its timely renaissance has served my present purposes well in a doubly fortuitous sense. On the one hand, we can reassess Jaspers' status among critical theorists by placing his insights closer to the communicative optimism of second-generation critical theory as most comprehensively developed by Habermas. On the other hand, we can make an epistemic virtue of the burgeoning social science literature advancing, redacting, and critiquing Jasper's original axial thesis. Deriving a philosophical program adequately informed by the social sciences offers a richer and increasingly more complex narrative of the emergent cross civilizational Axial backdrop, closest to the political and moral innovations associated with alternate and multiple modernities (Taylor 2001; Rasmussen 2010, 2012). The plurality implied by multiple modernities, nonetheless, need not cloud our irrevocable normative threshold of universal species-wide justice. Cosmoipolitan justice as a viable philosophical theory discloses yet unexplored realms of overlapping consensus on common goods as diverse as peace, security, material well-being, and a sentiment for humanity without necessarily presupposing shared background justifications for why we hold those norms nor presuming agreement over the best legal forms for institutionalizing these ideals.

Also of a critical theorist bent, but more along the lines of attentiveness to social-scientific detail, Jaspers' Axial thesis has likewise been re-appropriated by those challenging—on an empirical basis—neo-Weberian and neo-Durkheimian proclivities to collapse the classically formulated secularization thesis with an objective value-free social science. In this second camp, the sociology of religion also deeply informed by the lifework of S. N. Eisenstadt currently offers the best available social science literature required to construct an empirically informed radical critique of global modernities. Pairing together the great axial traditions with the great revolutions that led to the civilizations of modernity (Eisenstadt 2006), we can develop a political theory with a deeper basis for its legitimation. Cosmoipolitan justice moves us beyond the hegemony and neo-colonial excess of conflating moral progress, impartial reason, and the secular constitutional state. We must wholeheartedly avoid making an administrative fetish of the species-ethical universality of the Axial traditions that are nonetheless certainly among leading institutional candidates as alternatives to the perpetual misuses of state and cosmopolitan coercive power. Highlighting the revolutionary impulses inherent to each Axial tradition as an alternative source for checking administrative drives toward empire and colonial expansion, we avoid imposing a narrative of Western secular progress as the sole guarantor of ongoing rationalization.

Lastly, in the third camp of those most interested in deriving normative correctives to tyrannical forms of legal-juridical domination, theorists of transnational governance offer some much needed practical direction as pertains to best routes to institutionalizing cosmoipolitan justice as a political program, primarily and most developed via the critique and analysis of the EU (Bohman 2007; Follesdal 2013; McCormick 2002). Loosely included among these figures include critical theorists skeptical of cosmopolitan imperialism (McCarthy 2009, 2013; Bellah 2011, pp. 567–608), and non-Western critiques of the European biases that purportedly pervade the prevailing international legal framework (Koskeniemi 2011; Onuma 2010; Mendieta 2009; Asad 2003). The growing suspicion towards a characteristically European reading of a secular modernity also serves as consistent with the critical theorist slant of this text that believes our normative conclusions must be continually informed and redacted appropriately. The pursuit of a reflective equilibrium must both adequately describe the increasingly plural social world as it is and prescribe empirically informed ethical, moral, and political norms for how we would like the world to be.

Since the social scientific terrain as yet to be charted has heretofore traveled down these three distinct roads, I will make the preliminary move toward disclosing a philosophical method to direct the path where they might, at least under an ideal theoretical construct, coalesce. My general notion behind the term *cosmoipolitan justice* would be to make the post-secular turn of rehabilitating the cosmic and/or transcendent dimensions of civilizational analysis that have so far been overlooked in modernization theory. Eliding the conceptually myopic straight-jackets of grand-theory, we refrain from a making a comprehensive endorsement of the administrative commitments of Weber, economic industrialization of Marx, and democratic politicization of Habermasian neo-Kantian cosmopolitanism (Chap. 4).

I will instead employ the multiple modernities thesis as the justification for my privileging of *cosmoi* over *cosmos*, including the related assumption that modernity, while usually cast in the singular, has actually derived its reflective character from a rich hybrid of multiple sources of inter-axial borrowing. Even the most uncontested genealogies of Western modernity have treated as canonical an inherently dyadic universe strained by the agonistic tension between the mundane and transcendent, the secular and sacred, or more generally, the inter-Axial co-originally of Athens and Jerusalem (Chap. 3). In another iteration of the pluralized *cosmoi*, my aim via appeal to recasting a de-territorialized principle of subsidiarity (Chap. 5) will also be to reconstruct a more accurate genealogy of these interlocking tensions, as I intentionally avoid legal-juridical sources of structural domination by turning to civil society and the local rather than human rights and the global. This will offer a means to tap into the moral ethical norms that traverse, sometimes encumber, and occasionally overlap as the inter-axial social currents that continue to this day to feed into transnational governance mechanisms.

My use of the term *cosmopolitanism* carries many additional intended connotations. On the one hand, I want to concede to cosmopolitans that, under conditions of globality (namely, that shared transnational problems do not necessarily entail any uniform movement toward greater politico-institutional progress collectively among humanity—or greater regress—but rather under pervasive conditions of worldwide interdependence suggest hints of both), the moral demands of justice extend universally as competing ethical claims to envelop the entire species. The plurality of *cosmoi* plays off of (a) the incorporation of non-Western forms of modernity including the prospect of multiple world histories (Chaps. 2 and 3), (b) the recent theoretical insight that Western modernity has also historically taken on multiple forms (Chap. 5), (c) the concession that shared normative ideals, even when derived from equally ‘Western’ contexts—the EU and US—need not presuppose consensus over their background justifications nor agreement on an ultimate convergence toward ever-more encompassing transnational (or global) federations (Chap. 4), (d) the ongoing development of the major Axial traditions that have informed conceptions of modernity when characterized by species capacities for second-personal reflexivity (see Chaps. 2 and 3), and (e) the cosmic dimensions shaped by the major world religions that have modified the social science rubrics for inter-civilizational comparisons away from a temporal casting of stadial consciousness guiding history toward rational progress to a spatial emphasis upon opening new public realms for inter-Axial debate.

Therefore, in this opening chapter, following the philosophical methodology of Habermas and historical spirit of Jaspers (Habermas 2002a, b; Habermas 2013, pp. 364–365), I will be most interested in providing a deeper theoretical basis to the work of S. N. Eisenstadt in light of his pioneering sociological comparative set of civilizations initiated by the Axial Age (approximately 800–200 BCE). In the parlance set forth by S.N. Eisenstadt, I will be focused on the sociological context that he—and now more fully articulated by Taylor, Rasmussen, McCarthy, and Casanova—respectively call alternate or multiple modernities (Casanova 2006, pp. 13–14). The ultimate goal of this text would be a critical appraisal of the Western biases of political theory as rooted in significant shifts in secularization theory. Such a

revisionist approach both critical theory and the emergent tradition of global philosophy (a) replaces the post-modern with multiple modernities as a rehabilitation of reason and (b) explores creatively the fruitful transnational gaps between global and local as best mediated by the great traditions of the Axial Age. While seeking both to preserve and reform new transnational types of political governance, this project also seeks to explore the increasingly de-territorialized but nonetheless transnational entities comprised by the epistemic, moral, and truth-disclosive qualities of the great Axial traditions. Each carries the unique tension that will define the future shape and ideals of the modern polity. In doing so, we must reconcile internal claims to ethical-moral species universality while conceding to axial traditions the status of perpetual minorities/outsideers when compared to the sheer demographics of the rest of the species. Lastly, in offering cosmoipolitanism as a viable alternative to cosmopolitanism, I will be employing the legal-juridical critical realism proposed by Onuma (2010) and Asad (2003) as a corrective to the neo-colonial tendencies that come invariably with the presumption of tying rational reflection to secular normative justification.

1.2 Karl Jaspers: Conditions for the Renaissance of Axial Age Scholarship

For Jaspers, what makes the Axial Age so axial (Casanova 2012, p. 191)? For Karl Jaspers, the Axial Age refers to the time period spanning 800–200BCE that witnessed the astonishing simultaneity of incredible cultural elites such as Confucius, Mencius, Lao Tzu, Buddha, the Hebrew prophets, and the Greeks Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Jaspers most succinctly defined the ‘axial age’ to initiate the birth of modern humanity as we know it to be comprised of existentially responsible historical beings. Although European scholarly reflection on the intellectual flourishing of this era among Egyptologist and Persian scholars had already begun as early as the 1770s, Jaspers’ seminal *Origin and Goal of History* (1949) suggests a unique blend of autobiographical and scholarly aims in the immediate post-WWII context.¹ These include but are not limited to: decentering the axis of world his-

¹ According to Thomassen’s analysis of the role of reflectivity in Jaspers’ philosophical methodology, ‘Karl Jaspers’ idea of the axial age and his search for ‘the origin and goal of history’ was directly related to his generation’s experience of a total collapse of order, and the subsequent search for order in the midst of the possibly most extreme hopelessness humanity has ever faced: Germany at the end of the Second World War....The reflexive exercise goes much beyond the experiences of the single person, although those experiences are indeed both real and vital, and absolutely necessary to understand. Jaspers himself repeatedly emphasized the centrality of reflexivity: he found it constitutive of the very spirit of the axial age period, but despite the enormous difficulties of his own historical moment he also believed in a ‘new historical consciousness’ of the present period....This all indicated tht the search for a new historical-global perspective was intimately linked to an experience of a collaps of order; it implied a search for a perspective of the present as rooted in an understanding of human history taken in its widest depth and globality’ (Thomassen 2010, p. 331).

tory away from a Eurocentric and/or Christocentric axis, stimulating future scholarship on comparative civilizational philosophies, and unleashing the full potential of limitless communication between cultural contexts bound in irrevocable ties of economic, historical, and global interdependence.

In the contemporary language of Charles Taylor, Jaspers foresaw the pressing need to shift our entire social imaginary toward what I will redact to the conditions of the present as the normative and descriptive features to inhabiting the epistemic perspective offered by cosmopolitan justice. While conceding the epistemic humility that such a project perhaps surpasses the expertise any single individual alone could master, along with Jaspers (1953), and then Eisenstadt (2003a, b), Bellah (2011), and soon, Habermas (2015)—I have likewise undertook ‘the necessity to attempt the impossible’:

Because the conception of its entire history is indispensable for philosophizing itself and can be performed only by a single mind, the impossible will have to be attempted...[W]e are on the road of the evening-glow of European philosophy to the dawn of world philosophy. On this road all of us individuals will be left. But it will go on into a future which, in addition to the most terrible, also shows the brightest possibilities. (Jaspers 1981, pp. 83–84)

Therefore, I concede with the work of Habermas in progress (Mendieta 2013), that in its nascent fragmentary and amorphous shape nonetheless clearly argues that to make the postsecular turn requires making an epistemic virtue of pluralism that in turn demands an in-depth understanding of *all* of the great axial traditions.

While devoting the greater weight of his attention to the cognitive, historical, and philosophical dynamics of the Axial Age, Jaspers regards its aggregate affect upon the species in spiritual terms as analogical to a global rite of initiation.

Once the break-through of the Axial Period had taken place, once the spirit that grew up in it had been communicated, through ideas, works and constructs, to all who were capable of hearing and understanding, once its infinite possibilities had become perceptible, all the peoples that come after were historical by virtue of the intensity with which they laid hold of that breakthrough and the depth at which they felt themselves spoken to by it.

The great break-through was like an initiation of humanity. Every later contact with it is like a fresh initiation. Subsequent to it, only initiated individuals and peoples are within the course of history proper. But this initiation is no hidden, anxiously guarded Arcanum. Rather has it stepped out in brightness of day, filled with a boundless desire for communication, laying itself open to every test and verification, showing itself to all, and yet an ‘open secret’ in so far as he alone who is ready for it, he who, transformed by it, comes to himself.

The fresh initiation takes place in interpretation and assimilation. Conscious transmission, authoritative writings and study become an indispensable element of life. (Jaspers 1953, p. 55)

For Jaspers, the term Axial itself elicits a sense of turning about or entering into a historical stage uniquely differentiated from that which came prior (Eisenstadt 2003, p. 198; Schwartz 1975; Bellah 2011, p. 272; Bellah 2012; Joas 2012, p. 9 Roetz 2012, pp. 250–253). Perhaps better captured in the German term *Achsenzeit*, independent albeit simultaneous social transformation occurred via elites including Confucius, Buddha, Socrates, and the Hebrew prophets (Jaspers 1957, p. 90; Taylor 2007, p. 151).

Jaspers claims a transition more radical than historical differentiation by pronouncing history as we know and experience it in the present had originally initiated at the turn of the Axial Age.

This axis would be situated at the point in history which gave birth to everything which, since then, man has been able to be, the point most overwhelmingly fruitful in fashioning humanity; its character would have to be, if not empirically cogent and evident, yet so convincing to empirical insight as to give rise to a common frame of historical self-comprehension for all peoples—for the West, for Asia, and for all men on earth, without regard to particular articles of faith. It would seem that this axis of history is to be found in the period around 500 BC, in the spiritual process that occurred between 800 and 200 BC. It is there that we meet with the most deep cut dividing line in history. Man, as we know him today, came into being. For short we may style this the ‘Axial Period’. (Jaspers 1953, p. 1)

While there seem to be others that had entertained the notion of the distinctiveness of the Axial Age, such as Max Weber’s reference to the ‘prophetic age’ (1920), Lasaulx (1856), Victor von Strauss (1870), Eric Voegelin (1974) and to a limited extent Alfred Weber (1935), it was Jaspers that provided the first fully developed historical characterization of the age from the decentered perspective of humanity as a species despite distinct simultaneous centers from the West (Athens and Jerusalem), Asia, and India (Jaspers 1953, pp. 8, 15–16; Eisenstadt 2003, p. 198).

Demonstrating uncanny insight into the contours of where future queries to address the enigmatic character of the tripartite *and* simultaneous emergence of the Axial Period, he evades neo-Hegelian proclivities toward offering a grand-historical narrative of Spirit. In agreement with the onslaught of criticisms of Hegel for engaging in gnostic speculations and for regarding humanity from the third-person perspective of a stadial consciousness, Jaspers rejects reconstructing its step-wise development from the myopic biases of a European world-view. Akin to Taylor’s own criticisms of the secular tendency to employ the past perfect tense of ‘having overcome’ the inherent irrationality of belief, Jose Casanova offers a succinct description of this ‘stadial consciousness’ he ascribes to the neo-Hegelian proclivity behind the false assumption of falling into a global narrative of Western secular progress.

Intrinsic to this phenomenological experience is a modern “stadial consciousness,” inherited from the Enlightenment, which understands this anthropocentric change in the conditions of belief as a process of maturation and growth, as a “coming of age” and as progressive emancipation. (Casanova 2013, p. 32)

My own view agrees with Jose Casanova’s cosmic shift in perspective from a univocal historical frame of reference to the simultaneity allowed by dispersed spatial references:

[O]ne could say that the social scientific study of religion had been permeated by a modern, secularist, stadial consciousness that placed the social scientists ‘here and now’ in secular modernity while placing their object of study, religion, ‘there and then’, as the ‘other’ that somehow persisted as a pre-modern anachronistic survivor in a time not contemporary with our secular age (Fabian 1983). This was the fundamental premise on which every theory of modernization and every theory of secularization were built. Our age of globalization, however, is changing this perspective. Globalization is the new philosophy of space that has come to replace the modern philosophy of history. In a sense, with globalization the spatial metaphor has begun to replace the dominant temporal-historical metaphor of Western secular modernity. (Casanova 2013, p. 32)

In light of the spatial reframing introduced by globalization, Jaspers had already foreseen the entailed communicative presuppositions that come with engaging in

the perspective of cosmopolitan justice as an alternative to viewing history from a stadial consciousness. By rendering the pervasive interdependence posed by globalization from the social-scientific participant perspective of an ongoing engagement of the species in potentially boundless communication, we must follow by Jaspers, and now Casanova, in adopting spatial rather than temporal metaphors. The spatial turn better captures the decentered, simultaneous, and agonistic formation of public spaces contesting both the hegemony of the secular narrative and permitting inter-axial debate over shared problematic circumstances (Knott 2014, p. 40). Jaspers posits this as a necessary pragmatic presupposition of human understanding that we cannot expect empirically to prove or deny: ‘we cannot deduce the unity of mankind and the existence of human solidarity from empirical investigations, even though these give us some pointers; nor can we refute this unity and solidarity by empirical investigations’ (1953, p. 42).

In addition, anticipating very likely advances in biological and anthropological research into the evolution of the species, he nonetheless remains skeptical of evolutionary premises giving a satisfactory account for the historically-unparalleled emergence of the Axial Age. By leaving the question of precise empirical explanation of the ‘why?’ of such a unique emergence, he nonetheless does find the prospect of universal human communication as *both* a necessary capacity to be assumed for the Axial turn and the point of departure from which the history of the species as such can, in a sense, be said to have begun:

We—all men—can share the knowledge of the reality of this universal transformation of mankind during the Axial Period. Although confined to China, India, and the West, and though there was to begin with no contact between these three worlds, the Axial Period nonetheless founded universal history and, spiritually, drew all men into itself. The fact of the threefold historical modification effected by the step we call the Axial Period acts as a *challenge to boundless communication*. To see and understand others helps in the achievement of clarity about oneself, in overcoming the potential narrowness of all self-enclosed historicity, and in taking the leap into expanding reality. This venture into boundless communication is once again the secret of becoming-human, not as it occurred in the inaccessible prehistoric past, but as it takes place within ourselves. (Jaspers 1953, p. 19)

With respect to the risk of historical reductionism, and as confirmed in Voegelin’s own reflections on the insurmountable historical gaps encountered in reconstructing what Voegelin termed the *Ecumenical Age* (1974), Jaspers argued that one grand historical metanarrative will not do justice to the threefold parallel emergence of the Axial Period. As for the latter risk of biological reductionism, Habermas (2008a), Bellah (2011), and others have reaffirmed the dilemmas Jaspers had already anticipated in applying the empirical assumptions of natural biological evolution to the distinct realm of social evolution.

By rejecting the likely prospect of an ultimate evolutionary or historical narrative fully to explain the coming of the Axial Period, if the event itself were so anomalous as to constitute a miracle, we might expect his final appeal would be to point to God. However, he seems to anticipate precisely such an objection and find in it the motive for continuing empirical investigation rather than bringing research to a close:

It might seem as though I were ought to prove direct intervention on the part of the deity, without saying to openly. By no means. For that would not only be a *salto mortale* of cognition into pseudo-knowledge, but also an importunity against the deity. I want rather to prevent the comfortable and empty conception of history as a comprehensible and necessary movements of humanity; I should like to maintain awareness of the dependence of our cognition upon current standpoints, methods and facts and, thereby, of the particularity of all cognition; I should like to hold the question open and leave room for possible new starting points in the search for knowledge, which we cannot imagine in advance at all. Wonder at the mystery is itself a fruitful act of understanding, in that it affords a point of departure for future research. It may even be the goal of all understanding, since it means penetrating through the greatest possible amount of knowledge to authentic nescience, instead of allowing Being to disappear by absolutizing it away into a self-enclosed object of cognition. (Jaspers 1953, p. 18)

His remarks earlier in the text would affirm solid ground for the above critique directed toward the Hegelian Absolute. In addition, the reemergence of Jaspers in circles associated with critical theory find a more amenable target of the above remarks in Heidegger's renunciation of the achievements of modernity for a non-normative history of Being.

However, Jaspers' suspicions toward theological and ontological metaphysics do not alone render all his reflections reducible to pragmatically historical analysis. For instance, despite the historical data of Indo-European horsemen as perhaps the empirical condition to bring about the transfer of seemingly overlapping phenomena in distinct regions of the globe and sociological data to provide the political conditions to make the historical age ripe for transformation on a grand scale, the description of preconditions does not translate to a causal explanation:

[T]he simplest explanation of the phenomena of the Axial Period seems to lie in common sociological preconditions favourable to spiritual creativeness: many small States and small towns: a politically divided age engaged in incessant conflicts; the misery caused by wars and revolutions accompanied by simultaneous prosperity elsewhere, since destruction was neither universal nor radical; questioning of previously existing conditions.... They are preconditions of which the creative result is not a necessary sequel; as part of the overall pattern of their own origin remains in question. (Jaspers 1953, pp. 17–18)

Nor do updated empirical assessments of contemporary authors address the questions of ultimate origin. These include a widening gap between the transcendent and mundane, the radical revision of prior held conceptions of the human good, the purging of society of paganism and idolatry (Taylor 2007, p. 770), and a growing conception that violence can legitimately brought about when done in service of the divine (Taylor 687).

Also akin to the general spirit of Taylor's affinity for Jaspers in his select remarks of his *A Secular Age*—and likewise, Habermas's new attention paid to the existential authenticity espoused by Kierkegaard—Jaspers' account of the reflection and critique characteristic of the Axial Age is given an existential twist as a crisis for melding authentic selfhood (Jaspers 1953, p. 2; Taylor 2012). In other he seeks to embrace the internal plurality of the tripartite split between the West, India, and China rather than overcome it at a higher level of conceptual abstraction. The crisis-induced new realization of human limitations and growing skepticism towards the dual promises of deliverance via scientific progress or technological industrializa-



<http://www.springer.com/978-3-319-12708-8>

Cosmoipolitan Justice
The Axial Age, Multiple Modernities, and the
Postsecular Turn

Bowman, J.

2015, X, 315 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-12708-8